

Top 10 Lies

Behind the *Washington Post's* Personal Attack on Dr. Bennet Omalu

Myth vs. Fact

On January 22, 2020, the Washington Post published a profile of Dr. Bennet Omalu based on the premise that he has falsely taken credit for discovering CTE. Furthermore, the piece alleged that he has distorted science in order to gain fame and fortune. While this made for a shocking headline, the story was riddled with lies, inaccuracies, errors of omission, and outright ignorance of science. The story was clearly written as a personal attack intended to advance a career and placate special interests that continue to be threatened by CTE.

No. 1

MYTH: *Will Hobson, the journalist who wrote the story, possesses a deep grasp and understanding of neurological research.*

FACT: He is a sports reporter with no training or expertise on how to critically think about or analyze scientific research and concepts. Those that have a deeper level of understanding of medical research should handle the analysis of science. This disturbing trend towards armchair science continues to set a dangerous precedence, and we must remember to look at the body of work and research in order to inform ourselves correctly. Dr. Omalu believes that no sports reporter should feel threatened by CTE, which has been established, replicated and acknowledged for years. Our understanding of CTE enhances sports and empowers players; it does not undermine sports.

No. 2

MYTH: *Dr. Omalu “did not discover CTE.”*

FACT: While brain damage in boxers [Dementia Pugilistica] had been studied for decades and was believed to involve specific proteins and features, Dr. Omalu, beginning in 2002, was the first to discover a disease that involved different proteins and features in the brains of football players and other types of contact-sport athletes and in military veterans that linked football and other sports outside of boxing to brain damage from repeated blows, sub-concussions and concussions. Dr. Omalu named this disease that he saw in the brains of these athletes and veterans “Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy” [CTE]. Dr. Omalu’s work advanced science and our understanding of brain injury. His work has been validated and reproduced by scientists across the world. CTE is now accepted as a disease and the science continues to evolve.

No. 3

MYTH: *Dr. Omalu did not “name CTE” and did not realize it had been used before.*

FACT: There was no formally named disease known as CTE in NFL football players until Dr. Omalu labeled it according to accepted medical research protocols. Dr. Omalu identified about 26 names in existing and published medical literature from which he wanted to name this disease in 2002. He eventually chose the name CTE. One of the primary reasons why he chose CTE was because it would satisfy a legal standard in the United States called the Daubert principle. Dr. Omalu recognized that this disease he had identified was an occupational disease and would soon end up in the court of law, and it did.

No. 4

MYTH: *“Across the brain science community, there is wide consensus on one thing: Dr. Omalu, the man considered by many the public face of CTE research, routinely exaggerates his accomplishments and dramatically overstates the known risks of CTE and contact sports.”*

FACT: For the past 18 years, Dr. Omalu’s research has withstood scientific rigors, been replicated throughout the world and has never been successfully challenged in peer-reviewed medical and scientific journals. As more is learned about CTE, the more apparent the risks have become in other sports. Dr. Omalu has always stated and continues to state

that knowing what we know now, there is no justifiable reason why any child younger than 18 years old should play American football, ice hockey, mixed martial arts, boxing, wrestling or rugby. These are the big six high-impact, high-contact sports. Dr. Omalu is currently working with other collaborators to develop technology for diagnosing and managing CTE.

No. 5

MYTH: *The researchers critical of Dr. Omalu and his work are objective.*

FACT: The Post failed to disclose some blatant conflicts of interest – that the researchers have worked for and with the NFL, NHL and WWE and have received millions of dollars in grants and other intangible ancillary benefits from these sports leagues and other affiliated organizations. Since Dr. Omalu's work began in 2002 these researchers have made repeated attempts to discredit Dr. Omalu and undermine his research, conclusions and positions. It must be noted that as in any profession, there are those who envy the accomplishments of peers.

No. 6

MYTH: *Dr. Omalu failed to follow National Institute of Health guidelines for diagnosing CTE.*

FACT: Dr. Omalu identified CTE in 2002. There were no existing NIH guidelines for the diagnosis of CTE until 2016, fourteen years later. Dr. Omalu's first paper on CTE was published in 2005 and was followed by many other papers including proposed diagnostic criteria. It was only years later that the NIH recognized Dr. Omalu's work and created guidelines for diagnosing the disease. The article also implied that Dr. Omalu did not attend a major NIH conference on CTE because he knew he couldn't defend his work. In actuality, NIH did not invite or inform Dr. Omalu of the NIH conference, so he could not attend. This was after the NFL had promised a multi-million-dollar grant to the NIH.

No. 7

MYTH: *In "Truth Doesn't Have A Side," Dr. Omalu falsely accused McKee of trying to take credit for his discovery, referring to her as "the blonde white woman who claimed she discovered CTE."*

FACT: Dr. McKee has always dismissed and condemned Dr. Omalu's work. Anyone who reads her scientific papers would notice how she carefully excludes Dr. Omalu's work in the narrative of CTE. The PBS documentary, "[League of Denial](#)" confirms that Dr. McKee was picked to do work on CTE long after Dr. Omalu published his first papers on CTE. In several television and media appearances Dr. McKee has positioned herself, by fault or default, as a pioneer of CTE while claiming that Dr. Omalu's work was irrelevant and suspect. In Dr. Omalu's memoir, "Truth Doesn't Have a Side," Dr. Omalu recounts a conversation with a close friend (who is an attorney and an American) after he saw Dr. McKee on CNN claiming that she pioneered CTE. Dr. Omalu's friend called him to discuss the historical narrative of race and science in America since Dr. Omalu did not grow up in the United States, and provided his opinion on Dr. McKee's omission of Dr. Omalu's contributions. Dr. Omalu relayed what this friend had told him: that the establishment, for sociopolitical reasons, may want to replace Omalu's black face with the face of a blonde white woman so that CTE may be better accepted by the general public. In order to see the broader context of this, please read "Truth Doesn't Have a Side".

No. 8

MYTH: *Dr. Omalu has stolen Mike Webster's brain and is keeping it in his house so no one can review it to dispute his findings.*

FACT: The NFL retained an expert in 2007 to review Dr. Omalu's work. Dr. Omalu turned over brain tissues belonging to Mike Webster, Terry Long, Andre Waters and Justin Strzelczyk, the first four cases of CTE in NFL players, to the NFL expert, who had them for several months. Dr. Omalu has reported his findings in scientific journals, which were peer-reviewed and validated. Dr. Omalu's findings have been independently validated and reproduced by scientists across the world. Dr. Omalu does not have Mike Webster's brain in his house or in his possession. Mike Webster was only one of the numerous CTE cases Dr. Omalu diagnosed in the early days of CTE. Dr. Omalu does not understand why this journalist was so fixated on Mike Webster. Furthermore, it is simply not fair to Mike's wife and children to be subjected to such ridicule and mean-spiritedness.

No. 9

MYTH: *Dr. Omalu has distorted his findings and exaggerated his role in discovering CTE so he could enrich himself as an expert witness.*

FACT: The only person exaggerating, and distorting reality is the Washington Post reporter Will Hobson, who cherry-picked information to create a negative perception of Dr. Omalu. For the record, Dr. Omalu holds eight professional degrees and certifications. He is a forensic pathologist and forensic pathologists work as expert witnesses and medico-legal consultants. Dr. Omalu was earning a good living as an expert witness *prior* to his discovery of CTE. He has worked as a retained expert witness and continues to work as a retained expert witness for plaintiffs and families in cases whereby the major sports leagues are defendants. He by no means relies on this income to survive; in fact, his work as an expert witness accounts for only a fraction of the income that Dr. Omalu earns. Omalu owns a private physician practice and provides pathology services to those that need them. Dr. Omalu began publishing all his work in the early days of CTE in highly regarded peer-reviewed scientific journals about 18 to 20 years ago. Nearly two decades later, for no apparent reason and without any new scientific information, this sports reporter started manipulating established scientific fact and regurgitating many of the same tropes the NFL used to downplay Omalu's findings in order to discredit Dr. Omalu. He believes the credibility of this reporter and the reputation of the Washington Post has suffered; this type of reporting is a prime example of why the media is held in such low regard and why newspapers are becoming less relevant in the public's eye.

No. 10

MYTH: *Because Dr. Omalu declined to speak with the Washington Post reporter, he must be hiding from truth and his critics.*

FACT: As he engaged in an email correspondence with Mr. Hobson, it became evident to Dr. Omalu that the reporter was clearly ignorant on the topic and was fishing for information that would advance his agenda. Dr. Omalu refuses to participate in "gotcha journalism" that seeks to discuss complex science in the pages of a newspaper. Dr. Omalu always welcomes dissenting opinions as long as it is grounded in the scientific process, empirical data, facts and truths. Anyone who reads the e-mail correspondences between Hobson and Dr. Omalu's attorney, Dr. Omalu's media consultant and Dr. Omalu himself will be appalled.
